

Listing of the Claims

The following listing of the claims is to replace all previous listings of the claims.

76. (Currently Amended) A method of downregulating expression of a target gene in ~~an~~ a population of RNA stress response-competent cells, comprising:

introducing into the population of cells an expression vector encoding a double stranded RNA corresponding to the target gene such that said double stranded RNA is expressed and expression of said target gene is specifically downregulated, and

wherein intracellular expression of said double stranded RNA in said population of stress response-competent cells ~~does not induce a detectable RNA stress response~~ decreases the level of apoptosis by at least 20% compared to the level of apoptosis in a population of cells transfected with the same double stranded RNA produced outside the cell, ~~and~~

~~wherein transfection of the same double stranded RNA produced outside the cell induces an RNA stress response in the RNA stress response-competent cell when administered at a comparable level.~~

77. (Cancelled)

78. (Cancelled)

79. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein said target gene is a pathogen gene.

80. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein said stress-competent cell is a vertebrate cell.

81. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 80, wherein said vertebrate stress-competent cell is a mammalian cell.

82. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein said double stranded RNA is expressed as a single transcript that contains an inverted repeat.

83.-89. (Cancelled)

90. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein expression of said target gene is decreased at least 50%.

91. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 90, wherein expression of said target gene is decreased 90%.

92.-98. (Cancelled)

99. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein an RNA stress response or lack thereof is detected microscopically by looking for one or more cytopathic effects.

100. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 99, wherein said one or more cytopathic effects are selected from the group consisting of detached cells, rounded cells, increased vacuoles and morphological changes, in comparison to untreated cells.

101.-140. (Cancelled)

141. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the region of the double stranded RNA that is present in double stranded conformation includes at least 20-25 nucleotides.

142. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the cell is an ex vivo cell.

143. (New) The method of claim 76, wherein the level of apoptosis is determined using a TUNEL assay.

144. (New) The method of claim 76, further comprising administering a second dsRNA against an mRNA encoding a protein involved in the interferon response, thereby preventing or reducing the interferon response.